AMAR CHITRA KATHA

No.201

NACHIKETA

and other tales from the Upanishads

AMAR CHITRA KATHA



The three stories depicted here are from the Upanishads. The Upanishads are also called Vedanta or "the end of the Veda" because they form the last branch of Vedic literature and because one finds in them the final aim of the Vedas—that of self-realisation.

The word Upanishad literally means "to sit down by someone". This throws light on the system of education prevalent in ancient India. When a pupil approached a guru to seek instruction from him, the guru would decide what to teach after assessing his receptivity. Thus, in the first story, Yama tests Nachiketa before giving him further instruction.

In the Vedic period, learning was achieved by direct experience rather than by verbal instruction. Nature was the teacher, as we find in the story of Satyakama. Even when verbal instruction was imparted, it was kept to the barest minimum. Prajapati, in our third story, utters, as instruction a single syllable—"DA". Obviously, the teachers of the Vedic age did not believe in long discourses! And what the teacher said was understood and interpreted differently by each pupil in the light of his own experience.

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NACHIKETA

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, THERE LIVED A SAGE CALLED VAJASHRAVA. HE HAD A SON NAMED NACHIKETA.



ONE DAY WHEN NACHIKETA WAS ABOUT EIGHT YEARS OLD —

FATHER, WHEN WILL YOU LET ME WORSHIP THE SACRED FIRE?

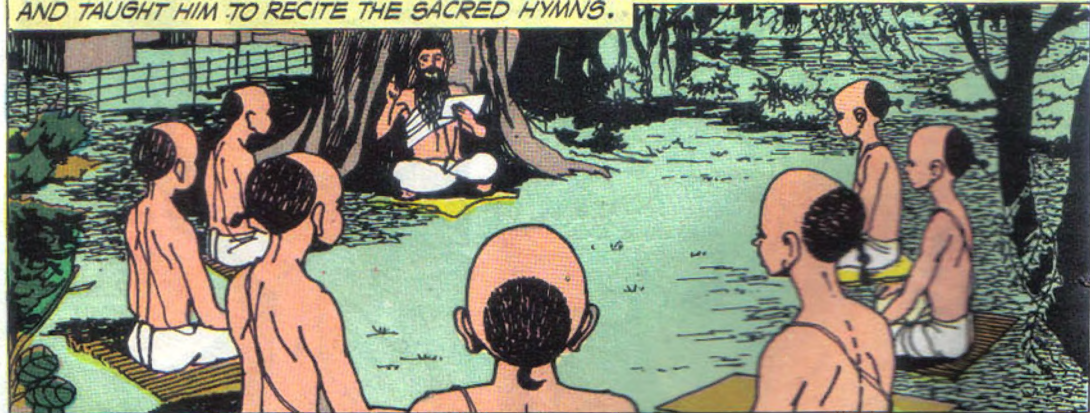
SOON AFTER YOUR INITIATION, SON.

*FIRE SACRIFICE

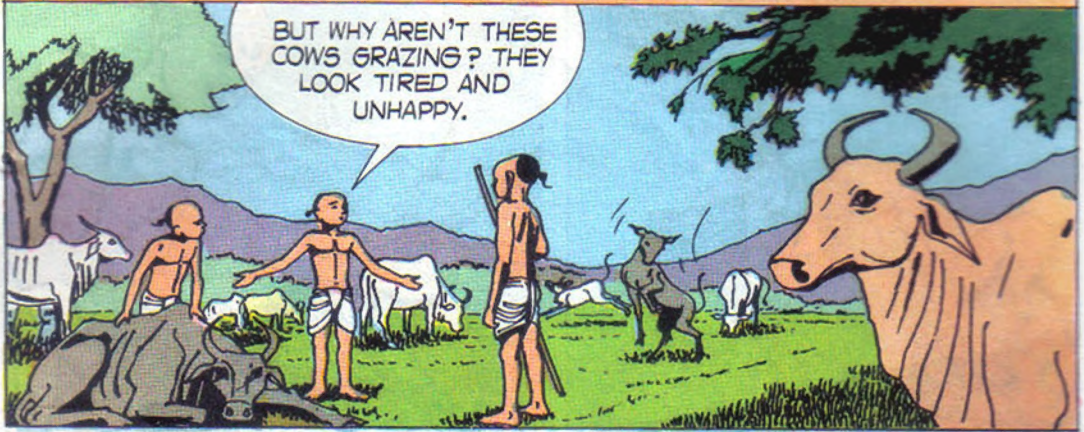

MY SON IS EAGER TO STUDY. I MUST NOT DELAY HIS INITIATION.

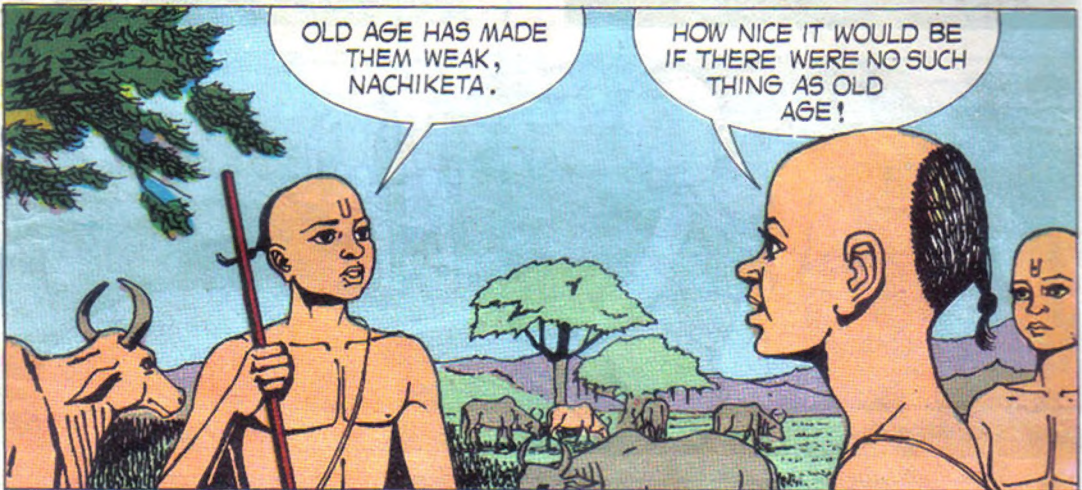

SON, IT IS NOW TIME FOR YOU TO GO TO A MASTER TO RECEIVE INSTRUCTION.

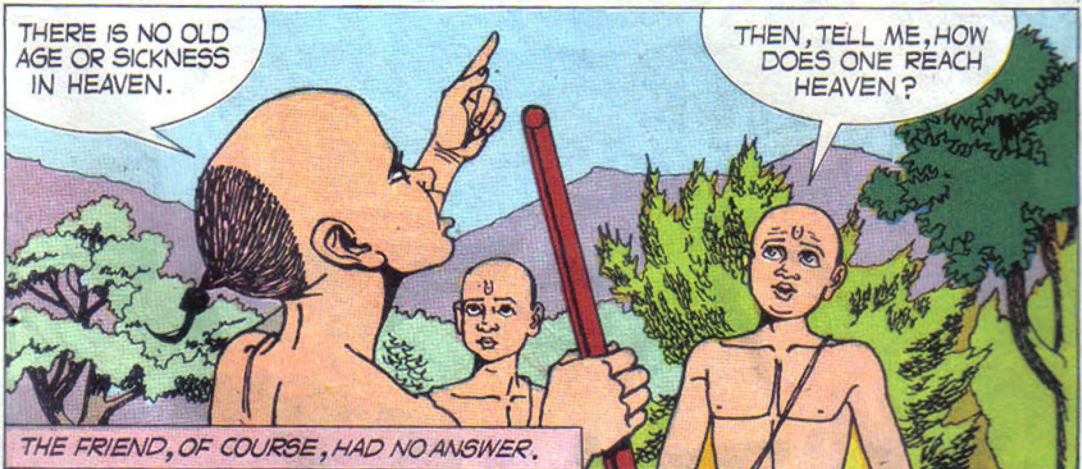

I WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN MY STUDIES AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.

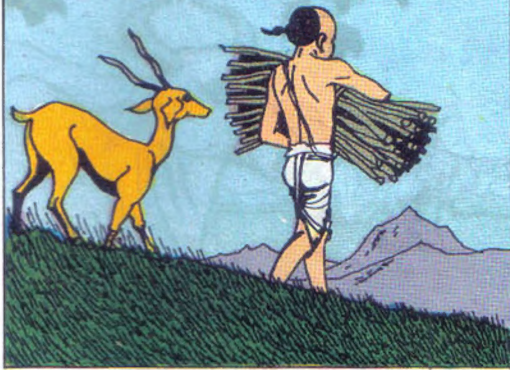

NACHIKETA WENT TO A GURUKULA, A FOREST-SCHOOL, WHERE HIS GURU INITIATED HIM AND TAUGHT HIM TO RECITE THE SACRED HYMNS.

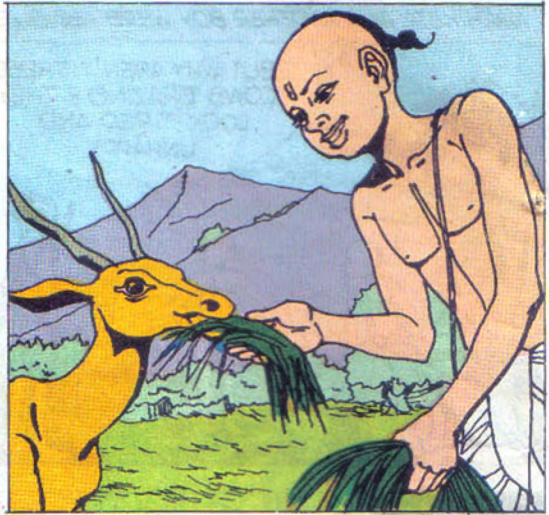
NACHIKETA AND ANOTHER BOY WERE ASSIGNED THE TASK OF LOOKING AFTER THE CATTLE.

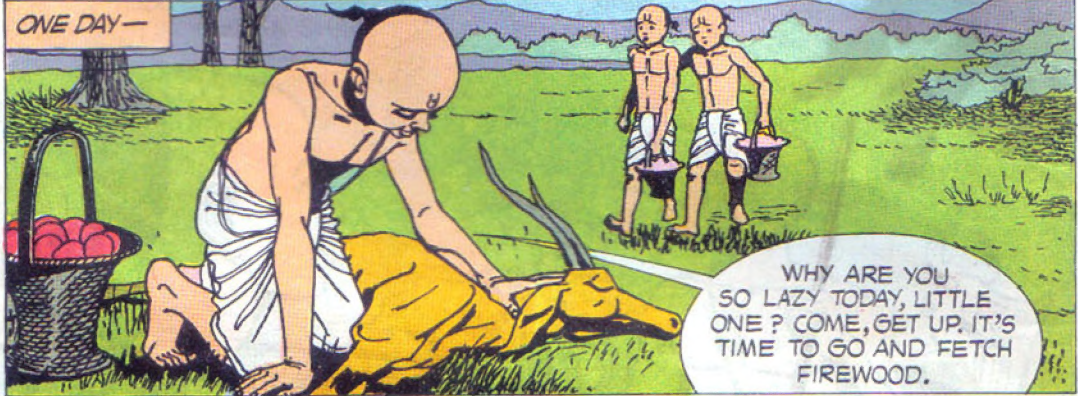


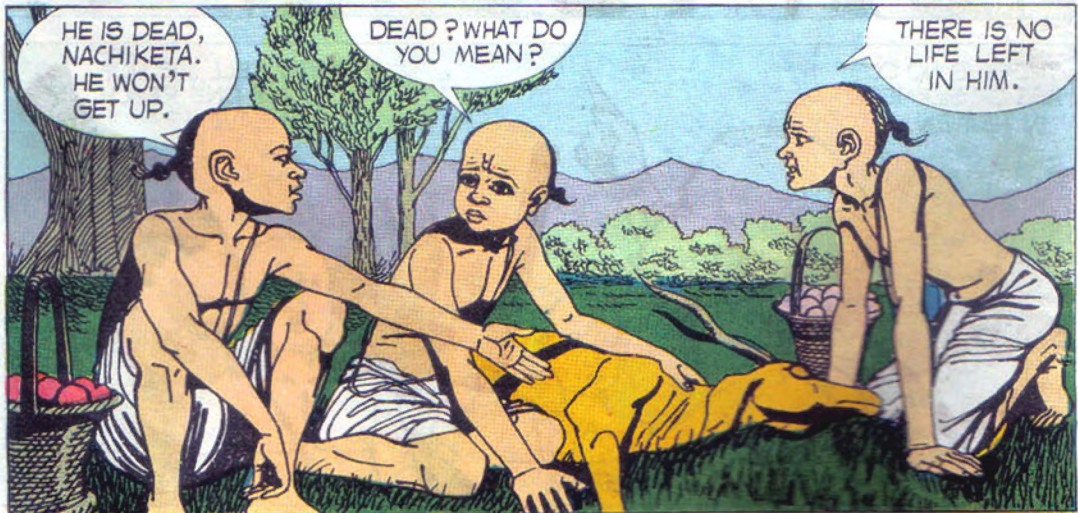


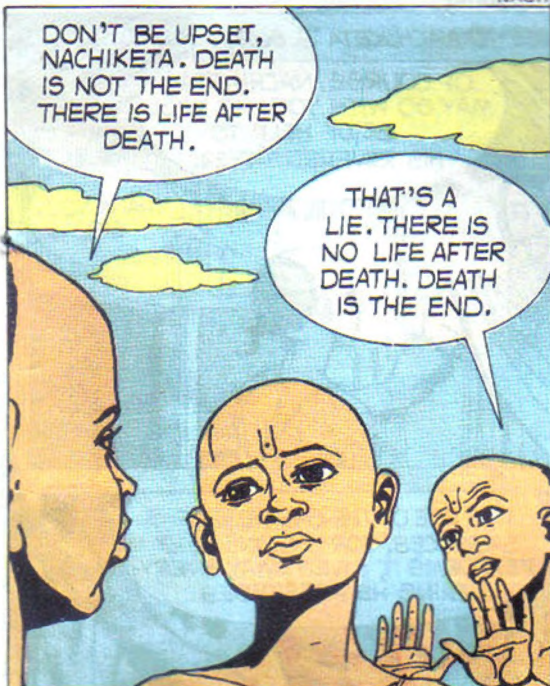



A DEER HAD GROWN QUITE FOND OF NACHIKETA AND USED TO FOLLOW HIM WHENEVER HE WENT OUT TO GATHER FIREWOOD.

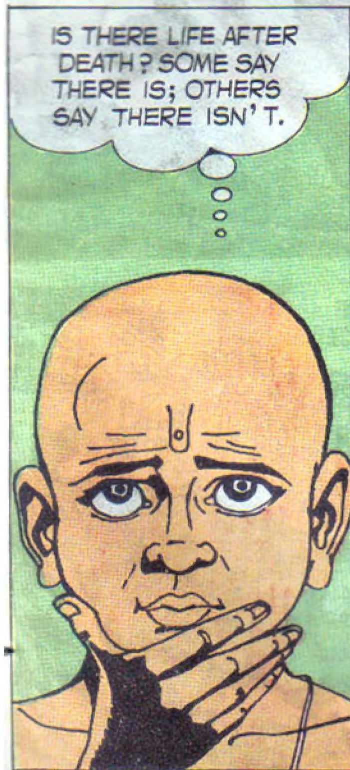



ONE DAY—
WHY ARE YOU SO LAZY TODAY, LITTLE ONE ? COME, GET UP. IT'S TIME TO GO AND FETCH FIREWOOD.


HE IS DEAD, NACHIKETA. HE WON'T GET UP.
DEAD ? WHAT DO YOU MEAN ?
THERE IS NO LIFE LEFT IN HIM.

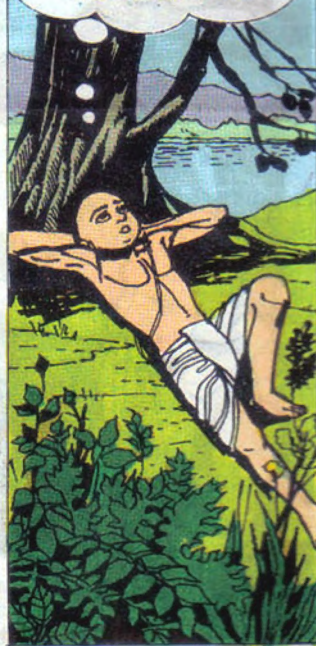


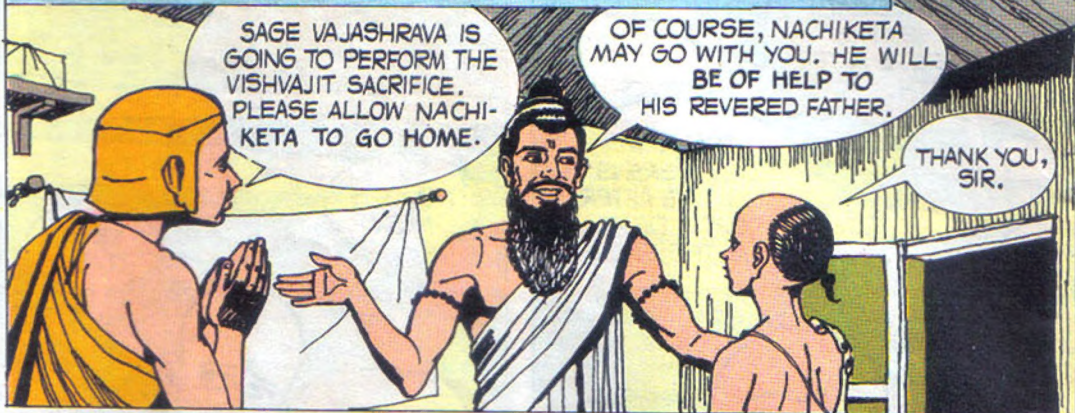


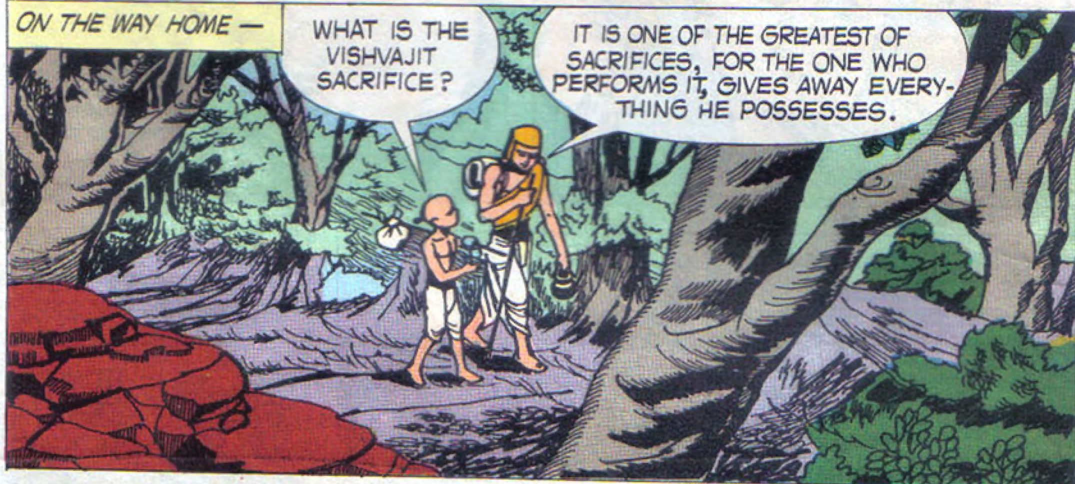


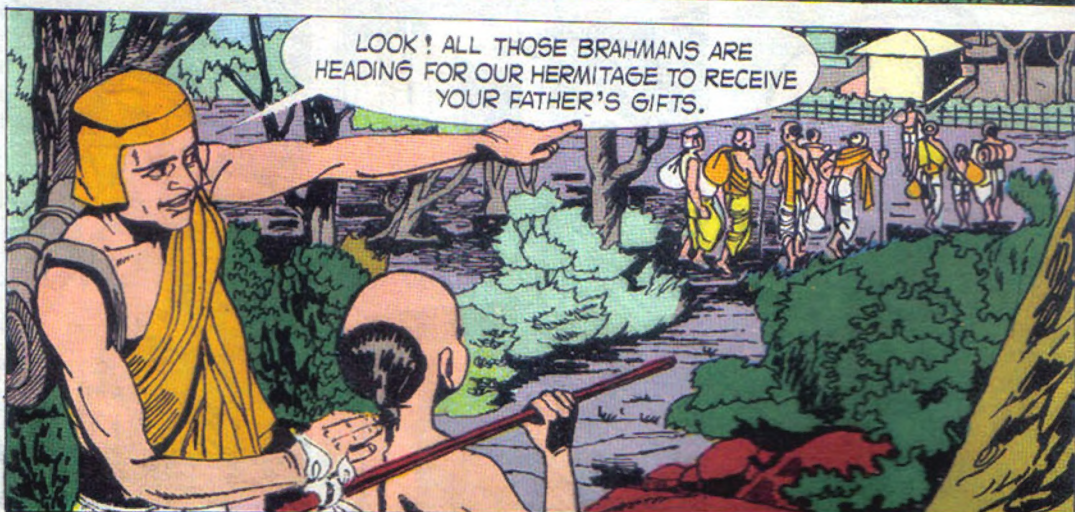
FINALLY, HE TURNED TO HIS GURU FOR AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION THAT WAS TROUBLING HIM.

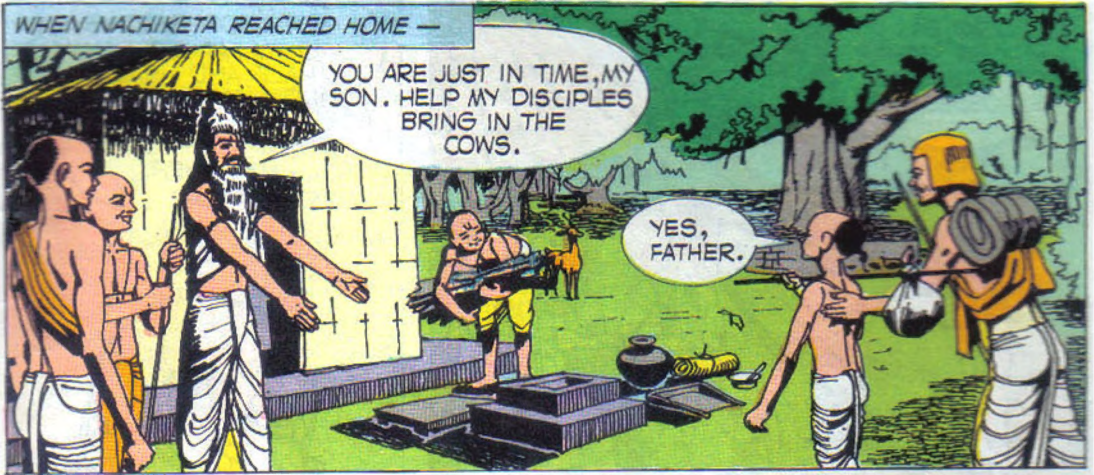




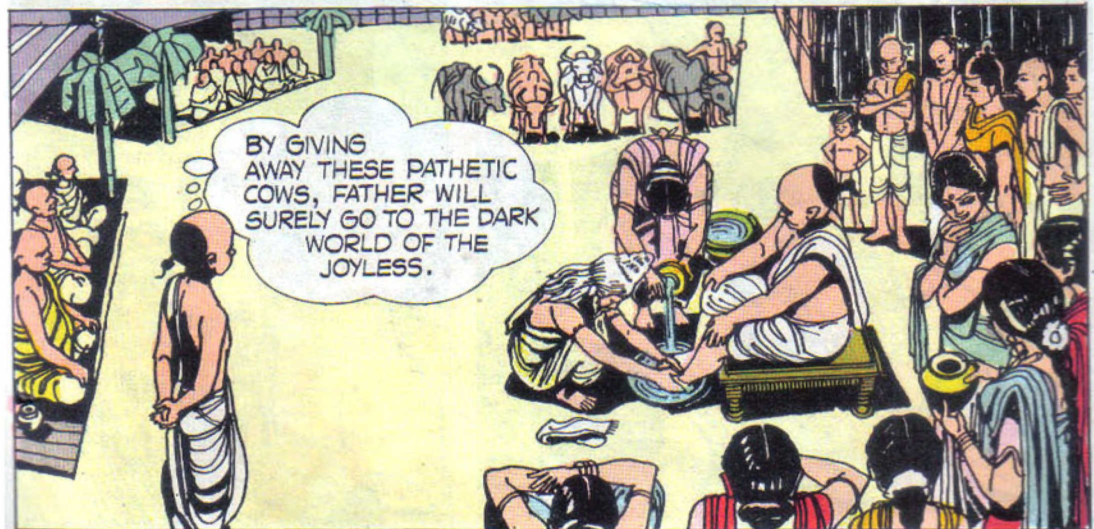

SOME TIME LATER, VAJASHRAVA SENT A MESSAGE TO NACHIKETA'S GURU.
SAGE VAJASHRAVA IS GOING TO PERFORM THE VISHVAJIT SACRIFICE. PLEASE ALLOW NACHIKETA TO GO HOME.
OF COURSE, NACHIKETA MAY GO WITH YOU. HE WILL BE OF HELP TO HIS REVERED FATHER.
THANK YOU, SIR.


ON THE WAY HOME —
WHAT IS THE VISHVAJIT SACRIFICE?
IT IS ONE OF THE GREATEST OF SACRIFICES, FOR THE ONE WHO PERFORMS IT, GIVES AWAY EVERYTHING HE POSSESSES.

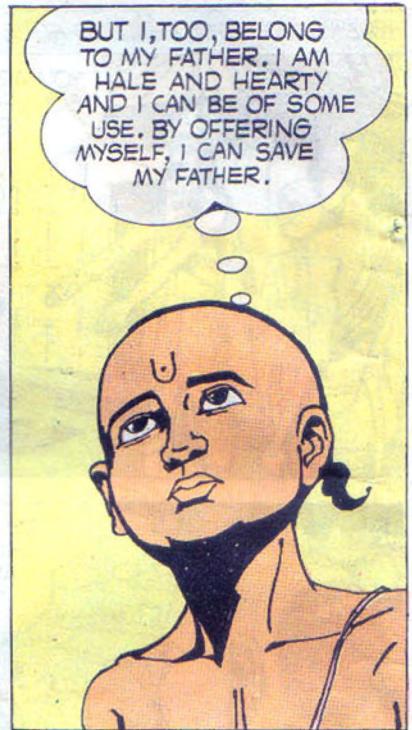

LOOK! ALL THOSE BRAHMANS ARE HEADING FOR OUR HERMITAGE TO RECEIVE YOUR FATHER'S GIFTS.

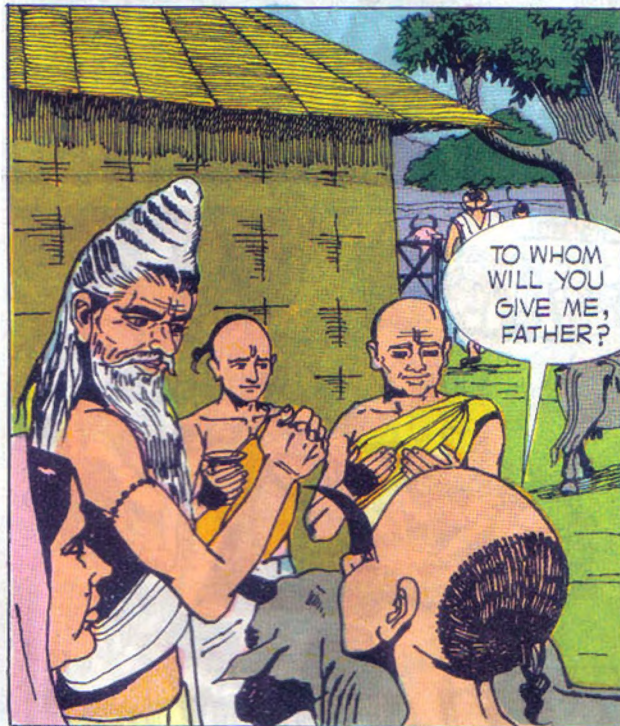

WHEN NACHIKETA REACHED HOME —
YOU ARE JUST IN TIME, MY SON. HELP MY DISCIPLES BRING IN THE COWS.
YES, FATHER.


OH, GOD! WHAT A POOR OFFERING THIS IS! THESE COWS ARE SICK AND OLD, TOO WEAK TO GIVE MILK.


BY GIVING AWAY THESE PATHETIC COWS, FATHER WILL SURELY GO TO THE DARK WORLD OF THE JOYLESS.


BUT WHAT CAN MY POOR FATHER DO? THIS IS ALL HE POSSESSES!


BUT I, TOO, BELONG TO MY FATHER. I AM HALE AND HEARTY AND I CAN BE OF SOME USE. BY OFFERING MYSELF, I CAN SAVE MY FATHER.


TO WHOM WILL YOU GIVE ME, FATHER?

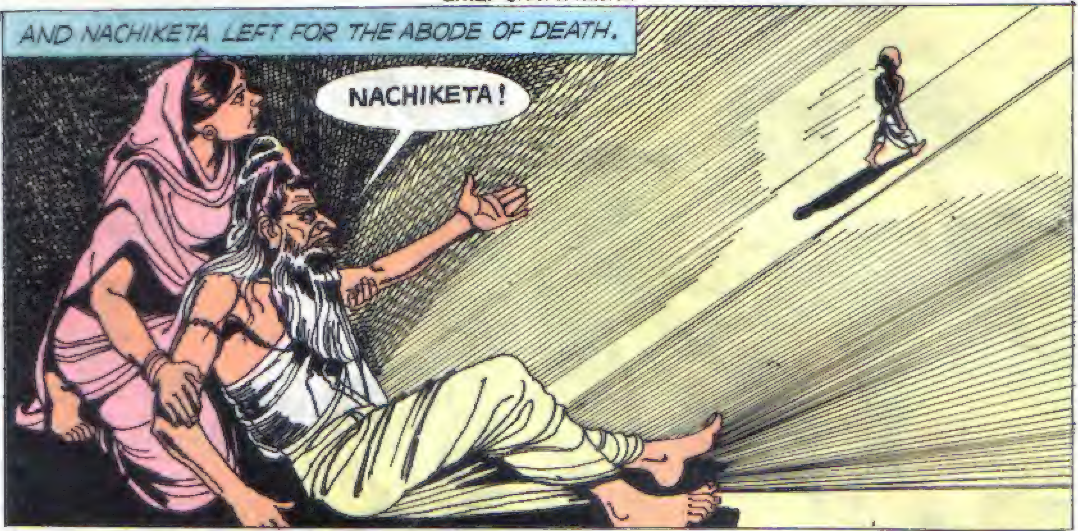

MY OWN SON MOCKS MY OFFERING!

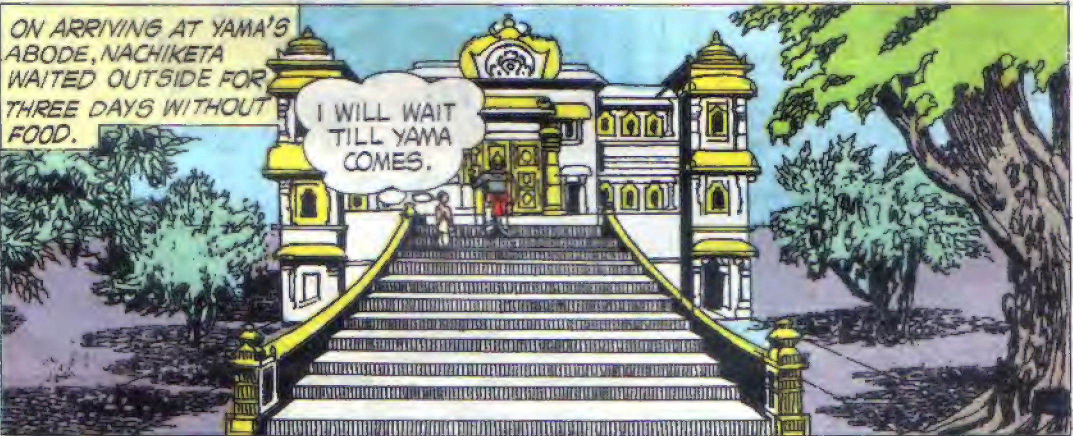

NACHIKETA ASKED THE SAME QUESTION AGAIN.
FATHER, TO WHOM WILL YOU GIVE ME?
HE IS TRYING MY PATIENCE!

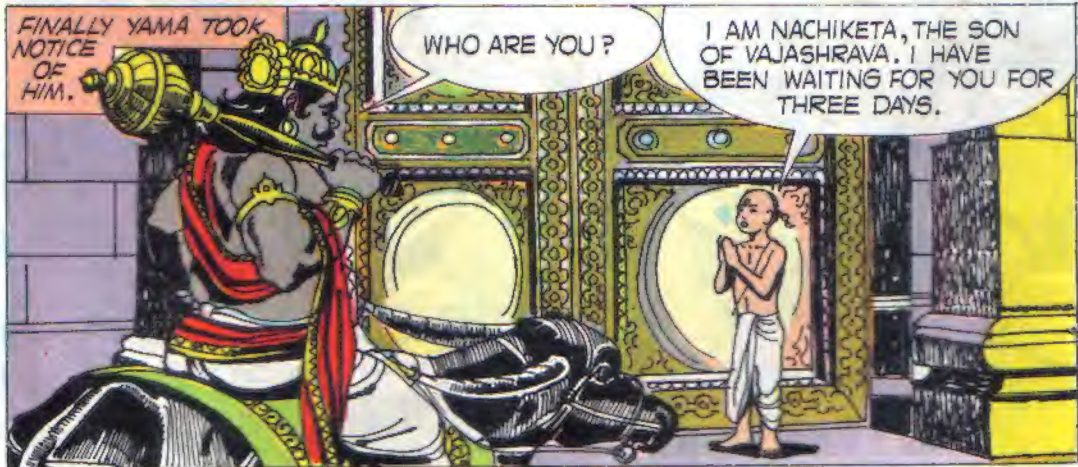

RECEIVING NO ANSWER, NACHIKETA REPEATED HIS QUESTION FOR THE THIRD TIME.
I WILL GIVE YOU TO YAMA, THE GOD OF DEATH!


THE SAGE REGRETTED HIS ANGRY WORDS IMMEDIATELY.
O MY SON! WHAT HAVE I DONE? NO, DON'T LEAVE ME. DON'T GO TO THE ABODE OF DEATH!
FATHER, DO NOT GRIEVE.

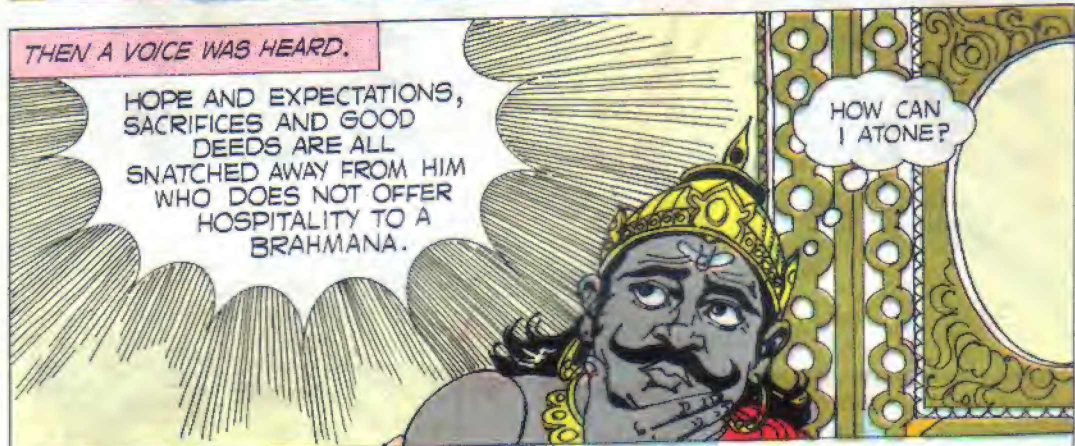

MEN OF OLD HAVE PASSED AWAY AND THOSE OF DAYS TO COME WILL ALSO PASS AWAY. LET ME GO WITH YOUR BLESSING.

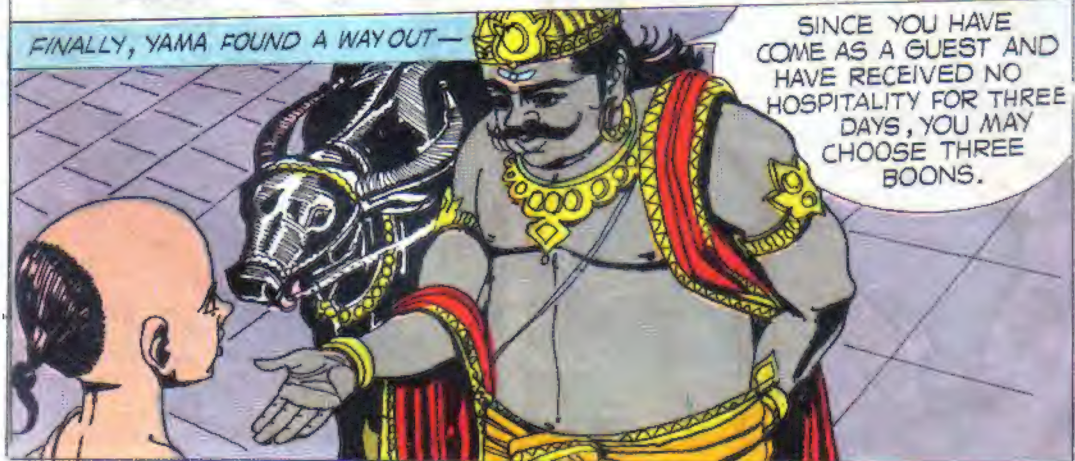

AND NACHIKETA LEFT FOR THE ABODE OF DEATH.
NACHIKETA!


ON ARRIVING AT YAMA'S ABODE, NACHIKETA WAITED OUTSIDE FOR THREE DAYS WITHOUT FOOD.
I WILL WAIT TILL YAMA COMES.

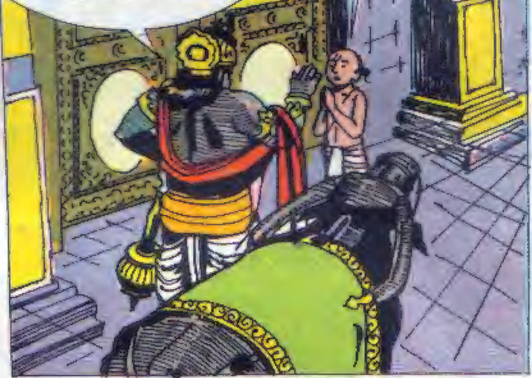

FINALLY YAMA TOOK NOTICE OF HIM.
WHO ARE YOU ?
I AM NACHIKETA, THE SON OF VAJASHRAVA. I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU FOR THREE DAYS.


DID NO ONE RECEIVE YOU AND OFFER YOU FOOD?
NO, MY LORD.


THEN A VOICE WAS HEARD.
HOPE AND EXPECTATIONS, SACRIFICES AND GOOD DEEDS ARE ALL SNATCHED AWAY FROM HIM WHO DOES NOT OFFER HOSPITALITY TO A BRAHMANA.
HOW CAN I ATONE?


FINALLY, YAMA FOUND A WAY OUT—
SINCE YOU HAVE COME AS A GUEST AND HAVE RECEIVED NO HOSPITALITY FOR THREE DAYS, YOU MAY CHOOSE THREE BOONS.


GRANT MY FATHER PEACE OF MIND AND MAKE HIM CHEERFUL. THIS IS THE FIRST BOON I CHOOSE.
HE SHALL HAVE IT. HE WILL GREET YOU CHEERFULLY WHEN HE SEES YOU RELEASED FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH.


IN HEAVEN THERE IS NO HUNGER, THIRST, OLD AGE OR DEATH. TEACH ME THE SACRIFICE BY THE PERFORMANCE OF WHICH NO HUNGER AND THIRST WILL BE FELT.
I WILL DO SO GLADLY. HENCEFORTH SUCH A SACRIFICE WILL BE KNOWN AS THE NACHIKETA SACRIFICE.

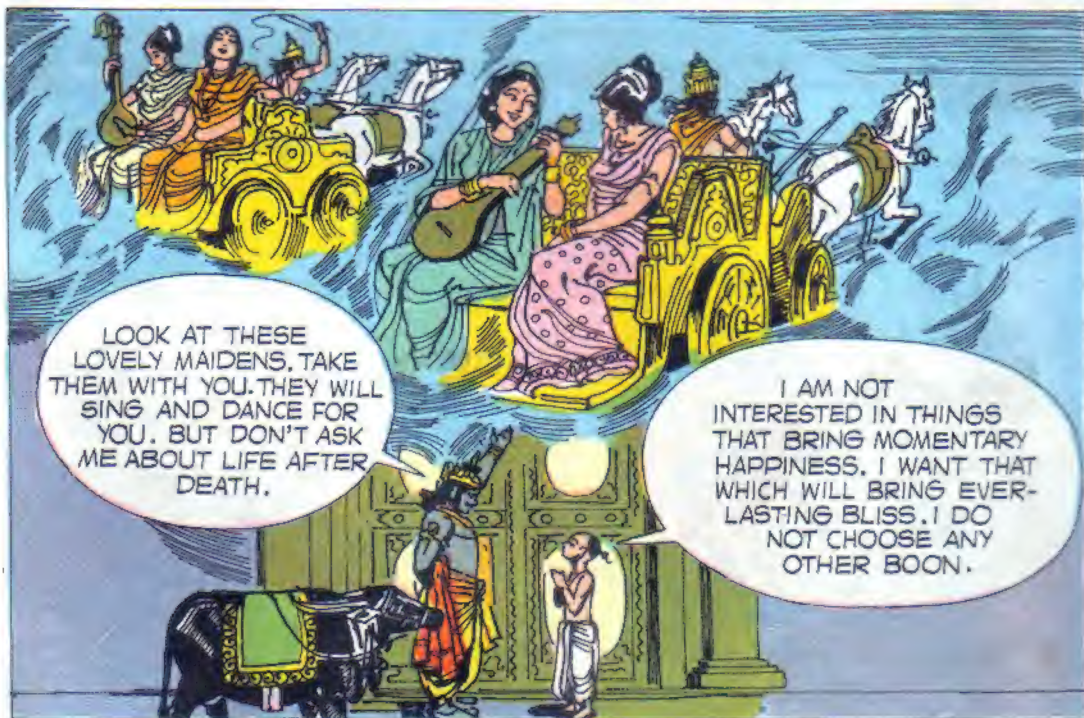

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH; OTHERS DON'T. TELL ME WHO IS RIGHT. THIS IS THE THIRD BOON I CHOOSE.


YAMA BECAME THOUGHTFUL.
I HAD NOT EXPECTED SUCH A QUESTION FROM SO YOUNG A BOY. LET ME TEST HIM.

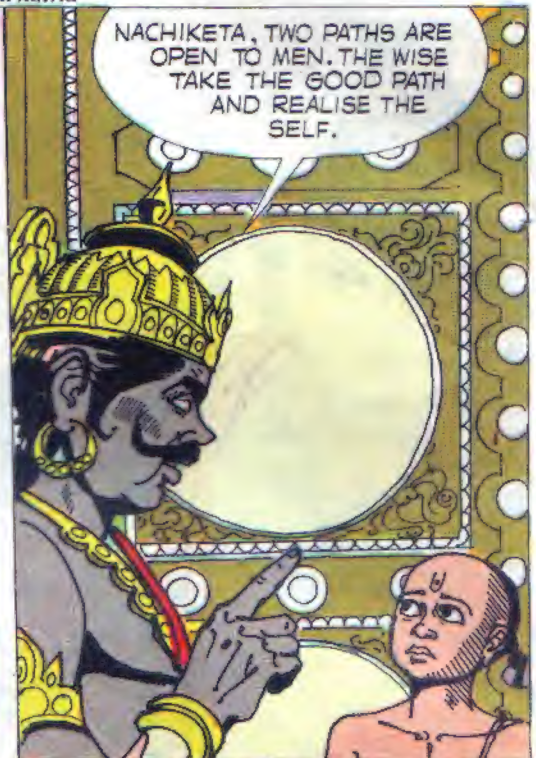
EVEN THE GODS ARE NOT CERTAIN ABOUT THIS. IT IS NOT EASILY UNDER-STOOD. ASK FOR SOMETHING ELSE.

WHO ELSE CAN MAKE IT UNDER-STANDABLE BUT YOU, WHO PRESIDE OVER DEATH? PLEASE INSTRUCT ME.

NACHIKETA, ASK FOR CATTLE, ELEPHANTS, GOLD, AN EMPIRE, LONG LIFE—ANYTHING BUT THIS ....





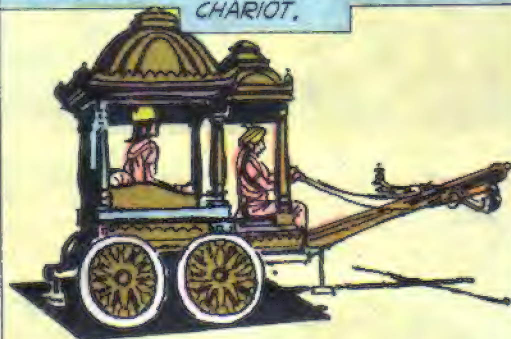


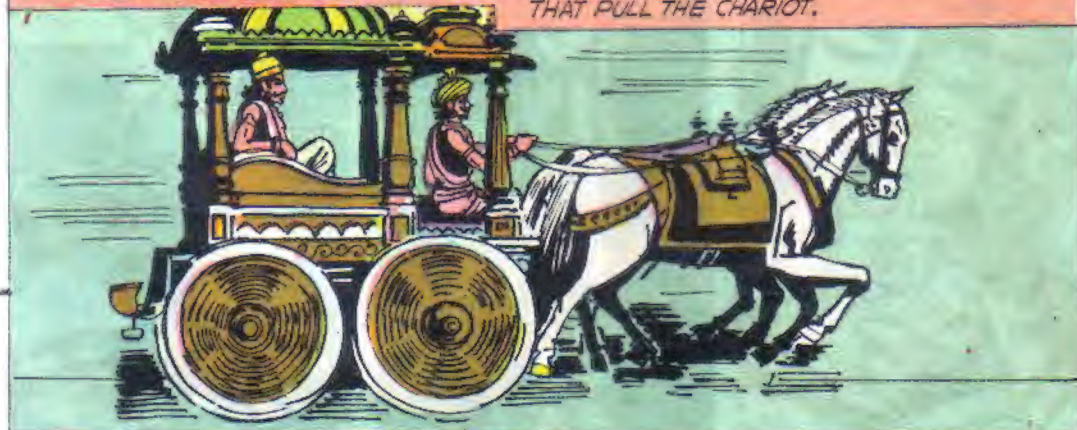
"THE OTHERS FOOLISHLY CHOOSE THE PATH OF PLEASURE AND GO THROUGH THE NEVER-ENDING CYCLE OF BIRTH AND DEATH."


YAMA PROCEEDED TO TEACH NACHIKETA THE NATURE OF THE SELF.
WHEN A MAN IS DEAD, IT IS THE BODY THAT PERISHES, NOT THE SELF.
BUT AREN'T THEY THE SAME?


NO, THEY ARE NOT. THE SELF RESIDES IN THE BODY AS A MASTER DOES IN HIS CHARIOT. THE TWO ARE DIFFERENT.


THE SELF, THEN, MUST BE THE SAME AS THE INTELLECT.
NO, IT ISN'T.


"THE INTELLECT IS TO THE SELF WHAT THE DRIVER IS TO THE MASTER OF THE CHARIOT.

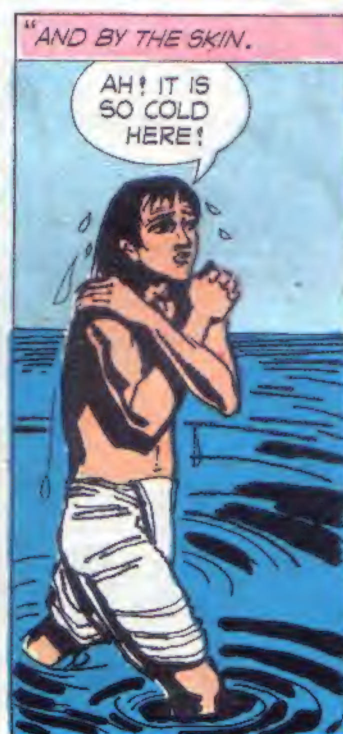

"THE SELF IS DIFFERENT FROM THE SENSE ORGANS, TOO, WHICH ARE LIKE THE HORSES THAT PULL THE CHARIOT.


"MEN ARE PULLED IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS BY THE SENSE ORGANS.
"BY THE EYE—
AH! WHAT A LOVELY GIRL!


"BY THE EAR—
THIS SWEET MUSIC WON'T ALLOW ME TO MEDITATE.


"BY THE NOSE—
THIS FRAGRANCE IS SO AGREEABLE!


"BY THE TONGUE—
THIS IS DELICIOUS!

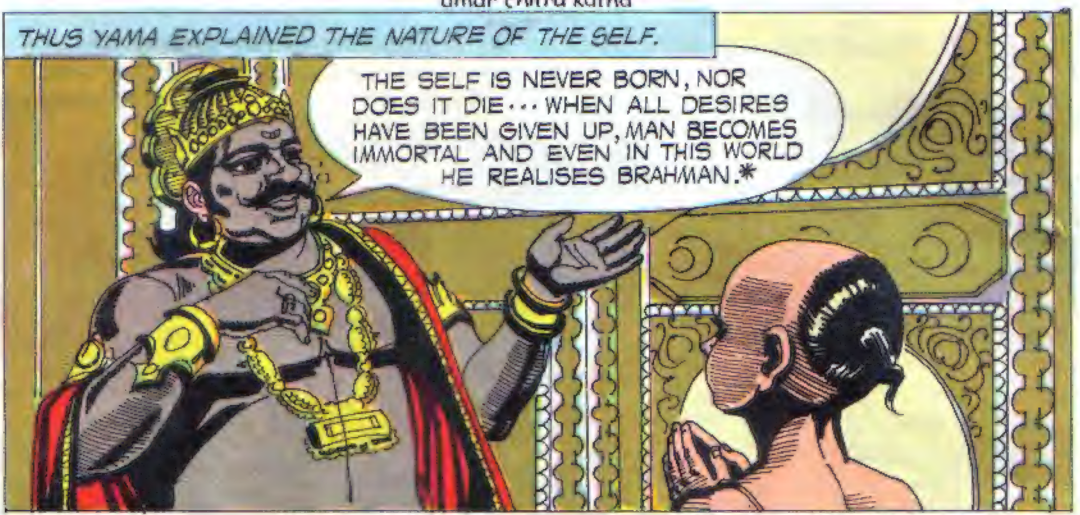

"AND BY THE SKIN.
AH! IT IS SO COLD HERE!


"JUST AS THE HORSES ARE HELD IN CHECK BY THE REINS . . .


"...SO ALSO THE SENSE ORGANS ARE HELD IN CHECK BY THE MIND.
NO, I WON'T LOOK THAT WAY. LET ME CONCENTRATE ON STUDYING THESE SCRIPTURES.


"IF THE HORSES ARE NOT KEPT IN CONTROL THE GOAL IS NOT REACHED."


SIMILARLY, THE MAN WHO CANNOT CONTROL THE SENSES WON'T REACH HIS GOAL.



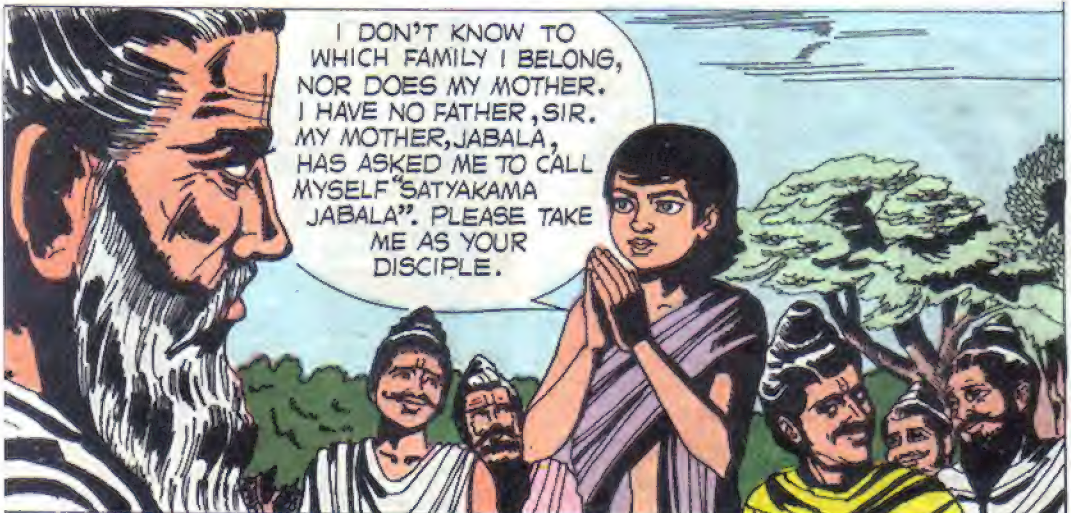




* THE SUPREME BEING


SATYAKAMA
GAUTAMA WAS ONE OF THE FOREMOST OF SAGES IN ANCIENT INDIA. MANY SEEKERS OF TRUTH FOUND THEIR WAY TO HIS FOREST-SCHOOL.


ONE DAY, A BOY OF EIGHT YEARS APPROACHED THE SAGE.
SALUTATIONS TO YOU, O MASTER. ACCEPT ME, SATYAKAMA, AS YOUR DISCIPLE.
TELL ME, CHILD, TO WHICH FAMILY DO YOU BELONG?


I DON'T KNOW TO WHICH FAMILY I BELONG, NOR DOES MY MOTHER. I HAVE NO FATHER, SIR. MY MOTHER, JABALA, HAS ASKED ME TO CALL MYSELF "SATYAKAMA JABALA". PLEASE TAKE ME AS YOUR DISCIPLE.

BEFORE THE SAGE COULD SPEAK, A SENIOR DISCIPLE INTERPOSED.

SIR, ONLY A BRAHMANA IS ENTITLED TO SACRED KNOWLEDGE. SATYAKAMA MAY NOT BE ONE.

HE WHO SPEAKS THE TRUTH WITHOUT FEAR OR HESITATION IS A BRAHMANA.

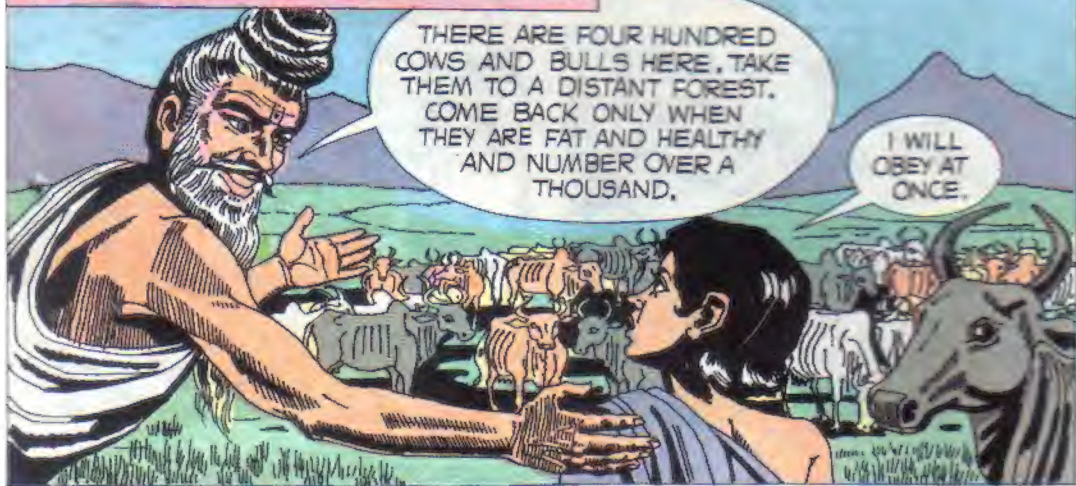
SATYAKAMA, I ACCEPT YOU AS MY DISCIPLE. WHAT GOAL HAVE YOU SET FOR YOURSELF?

SIR, I WANT TO EXPERIENCE BRAHMAN— THE SUPREME REALITY.

THE MASTER BECAME THOUGHTFUL.

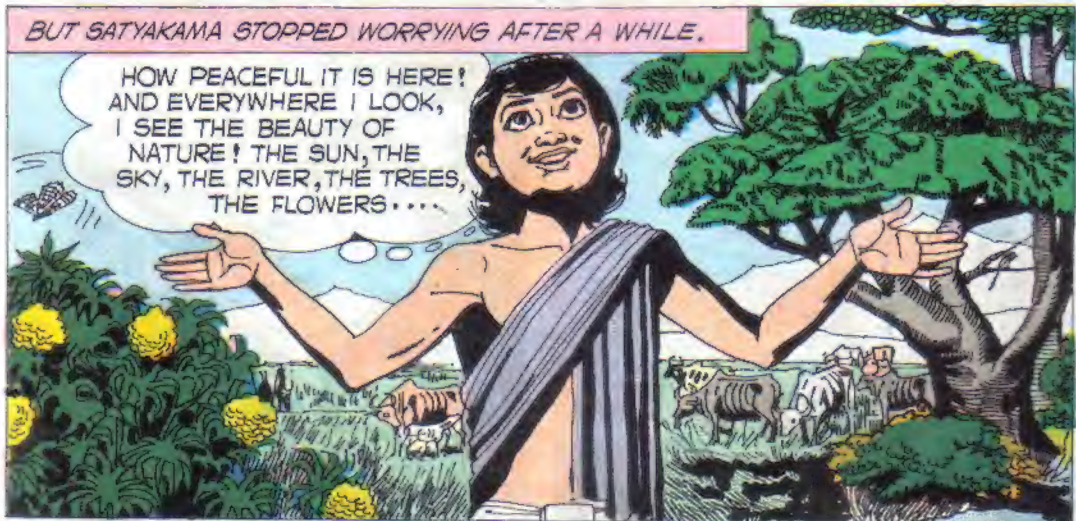
THIS CHILD IS TRUTHFUL AND SINCERE. I WILL HELP HIM IN ACHIEVING HIS GOAL.

ALL RIGHT. COME WITH ME.


THE MASTER TOOK HIM TO THE CATTLE-PEN.
THERE ARE FOUR HUNDRED COWS AND BULLS HERE. TAKE THEM TO A DISTANT FOREST. COME BACK ONLY WHEN THEY ARE FAT AND HEALTHY AND NUMBER OVER A THOUSAND.
I WILL OBEY AT ONCE.

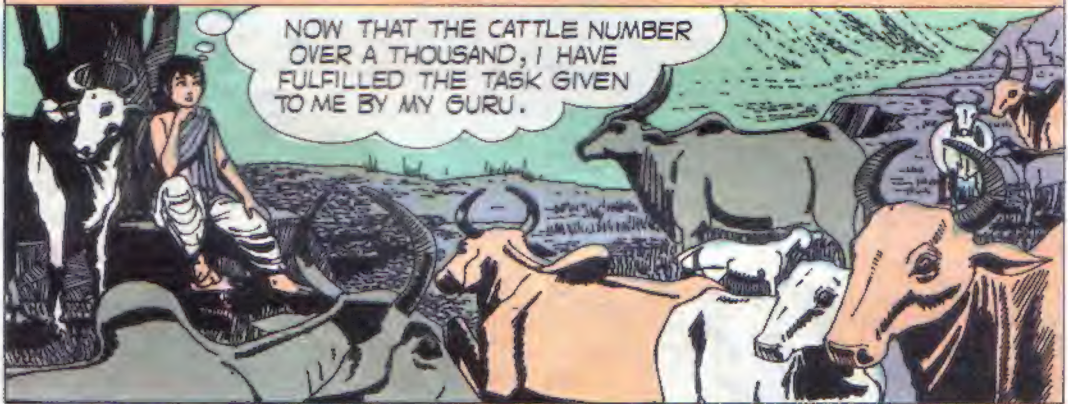

SATYAKAMA LEFT WITH THE CATTLE.


I TOLD THE GURU THAT I WANT TO EXPERIENCE BRAHMAN. I WONDER WHY HE SENT ME TO THE FOREST. IS BRAHMAN TO BE FOUND IN THE FOREST?


BUT SATYAKAMA STOPPED WORRYING AFTER A WHILE.
HOW PEACEFUL IT IS HERE! AND EVERYWHERE I LOOK, I SEE THE BEAUTY OF NATURE! THE SUN, THE SKY, THE RIVER, THE TREES, THE FLOWERS....


HE TOOK GOOD CARE OF THE CATTLE.


AT DUSK, WHILE THE CATTLE RESTED, HE MEDITATED.
WHERE SHOULD I LOOK FOR BRAHMAN? WHERE IS HE?


UNDER HIS CARE, THE COWS IMPROVED IN HEALTH AND INCREASED IN NUMBER.
NOW THAT THE CATTLE NUMBER OVER A THOUSAND, I HAVE FULFILLED THE TASK GIVEN TO ME BY MY GURU.


BUT AS HE WAS PREPARING TO RETURN TO HIS GURU HE FOUND THAT ONE CALF WAS MISSING. HE SEARCHED EVERYWHERE— IN THE NORTH, SOUTH, EAST AND WEST.
WHERE ARE YOU, LITTLE ONE?


FINALLY HE FOUND THE CALF—
OH, I AM SO GLAD I HAVE FOUND YOU.

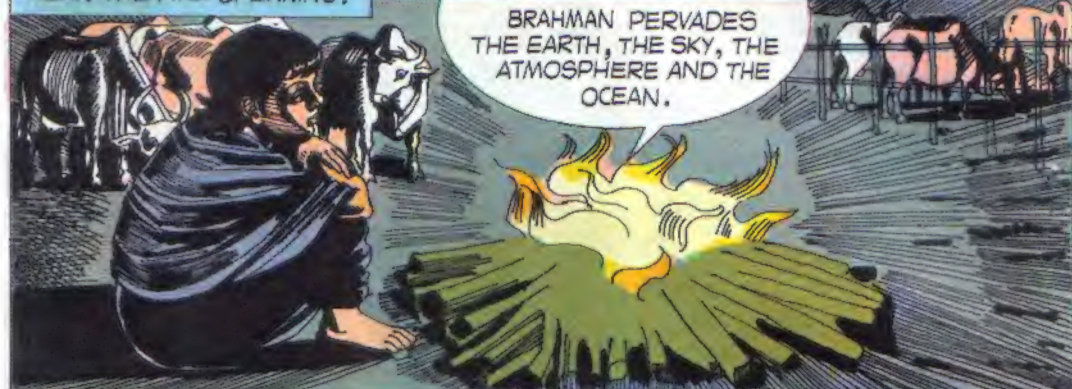

THEN HE BECAME THOUGHTFUL.
WILL I BE ABLE TO FIND BRAHMAN ALSO?


THAT EVENING HE FELT A STRANGE PEACE AS HE GAZED AT AN AGED BULL.


HE THEN THOUGHT HE HEARD THE BULL SPEAKING.
BRAHMAN IS IN THE NORTH. HE IS IN THE SOUTH, THE EAST AND THE WEST.


THAT'S TRUE! WHY SEARCH FOR HIM? HE IS PRESENT EVERYWHERE.


THAT DAY HE STARTED ON HIS RETURN JOURNEY, TAKING THE CATTLE WITH HIM.


AT DUSK HE BUILT A FIRE AND SAT BY IT. THEN HE FELT HE COULD HEAR THE FIRE SPEAKING.
BRAHMAN PERVADES THE EARTH, THE SKY, THE ATMOSPHERE AND THE OCEAN.


YES, BRAHMAN IS ENDLESS LIKE THE SKY.


THE NEXT MORNING WHEN THE SUN ROSE —
HOW LUMINOUS IS THE SUN ! WHO MAKES IT SHINE, I WONDER ?


A SWAN FLYING BY TOLD HIM THE ANSWER —
BRAHMAN IS IN THE SUN, IN THE MOON, IN THE LIGHTNING AND IN THE FIRE.
OF COURSE ! IT IS BRAHMAN WHO MAKES THE SUN SHINE !

SATYAKAMA STOOD STILL AS NEW THOUGHTS FLOODED HIS MIND.

THEN WHO MAKES ME BREATHE?

WHO MAKES ME SEE, HEAR AND THINK?

AS A BIRD FLEW PAST HIM, HE RECEIVED HIS ANSWERS.

IT IS BRAHMAN
IT IS BRAHMAN
IT IS BRAHMAN

WHEN SATYAKAMA REACHED THE FOREST-SCHOOL—

SATYAKAMA, YOU GLOW LIKE ONE WHO HAS ATTAINED KNOWLEDGE OF BRAHMAN. HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

SATYAKAMA DESCRIBED HIS EXPERIENCE.

BUT KNOWLEDGE IMPARTED BY THE TEACHER HELPS THE MOST IN ATTAINING ONE'S GOAL. PLEASE INSTRUCT ME, SIR.

I WILL, MY SON.

GAUTAMA THEN IMPARTED THE SACRED KNOWLEDGE TO HIS DESERVING DISCIPLE, WHO LATER BECAME A GREAT SAGE.

PRAJAPATI

THE DEVAS, THE CELESTIAL BEINGS, HAD ALL THE COMFORTS THEY COULD ASPIRE FOR AND LED A LIFE OF PLEASURE.





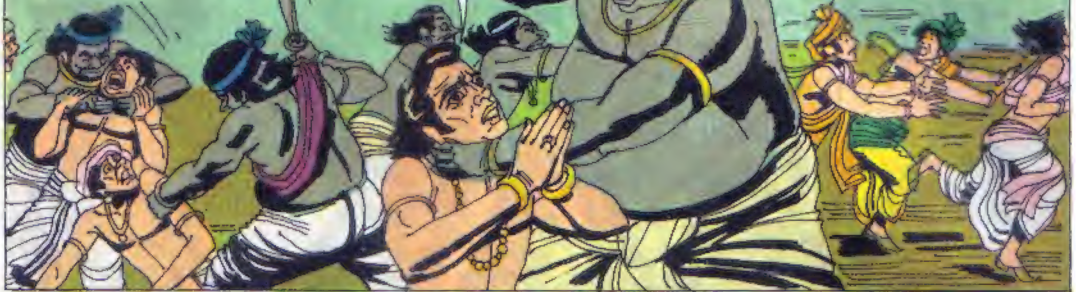

UNLIKE THEIR BROTHERS IN HEAVEN, THE MANAVAS—MEN ON EARTH—WERE LEADING A HARD LIFE.


A GOOD HARVEST! OUR FUTURE IS SECURE.


ON NO ACCOUNT WOULD THEY PART WITH WHAT THEY HAD GAINED.
GO AWAY, YOU WICKED BIRD. STEALING MY GRAIN!


YET, DESPITE ALL THE RICHES THEY HAD EARNED AND STORED AWAY, THEY, TOO, WERE FAR FROM HAPPY.
WE HAVE NO CONTENTMENT.
WHAT WE LACK IS PEACE OF MIND.
LET US APPROACH PRAJAPATI, OUR FATHER, FOR GUIDANCE.
THEY LEFT FOR THE ABODE OF PRAJAPATI.

THE ASURAS, THE DEMONS, INSPIRED FEAR AMONG BOTH THE MANAVAS AND THE DEVAS.



BUT THE ASURAS, TOO, WERE OVERCOME BY A FEELING OF DISSATISFACTION.



THE DEVAS, THE MANAVAS AND THE ASURAS PRAYED TO LORD PRAJAPATI.



PRAJAPATI, THE FATHER OF ALL BEINGS, UTTERED JUST ONE SYLLABLE.

DA ....

EVERYONE WAS PERPLEXED.

DA? WHAT COULD THAT MEAN?

I THINK IT IS THE FIRST SYLLABLE OF A SECRET WORD WHICH WILL TELL US WHAT TO DO.

I THINK **HE** WANTS US TO DISCOVER THE WORD FOR OURSELVES.

THEY ALL LEFT FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE HOMES TO PONDER OVER THE SYLLABLE.

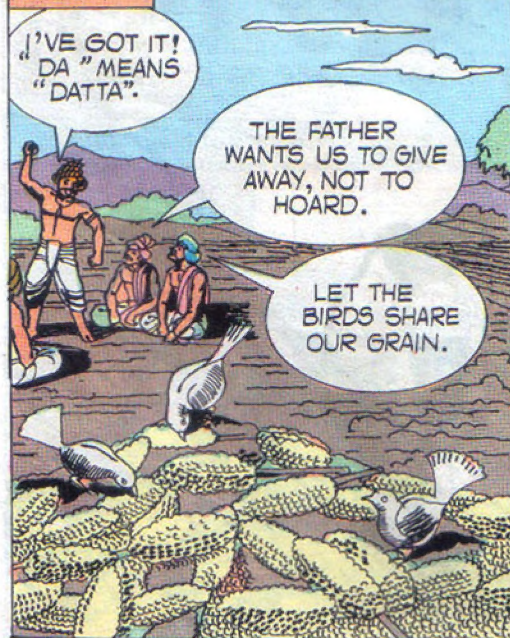
ON RETURNING TO THEIR CELESTIAL WORLD, THE DEVAS WERE ABOUT TO RESUME THEIR LIFE OF PLEASURE —

I'VE GOT IT! I KNOW WHAT "DA" MEANS!

TELL US WHAT IT MEANS.


"DA" MEANS "DAMYATA".
YES, THE FATHER HAS ASKED US TO RESTRAIN OURSELVES.
YOU MAY BE RIGHT.
ALL THE DEVAS PUT ASIDE THEIR PLEASURES. THEN THEY BEGAN TO PRACTISE SELF-CONTROL AND EXPERIENCED A SATISFACTION NEVER KNOWN BEFORE.


THE MANAVAS HAD ALSO GONE BACK TO THEIR WORK.
THOSE BIRDS AGAIN! THEY PLUNDER OUR GRAIN. WE SHOULD GET RID OF THEM ONCE AND FOR ALL!

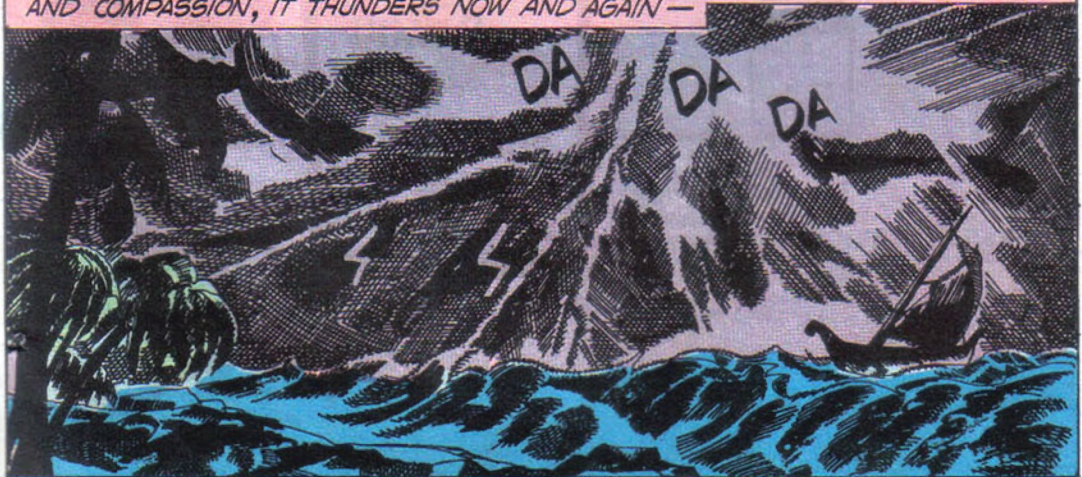

THE ANGRY MAN WAS ABOUT TO FLING A STONE AT THE BIRDS WHEN—
I'VE GOT IT! "DA" MEANS "DATTA".
THE FATHER WANTS US TO GIVE AWAY, NOT TO HOARD.
LET THE BIRDS SHARE OUR GRAIN.


MEN BEGAN TO PRACTISE CHARITY.
ONLY NOW DO I REALISE THAT THERE IS JOY IN GIVING.
HOW RIGHT YOU ARE!


WHEN THE ASURAS WERE ABOUT TO RESUME THEIR ACTIVITIES —
WAIT ! "DA" MEANS "DAYADHVAM".
YES, THE FATHER WANTS US TO SHOW COMPASSION.
RELEASE HIM.


GO WITHOUT FEAR, FRIEND. NO HARM WILL COME TO YOU.
YOU ARE KIND! THANK YOU.


THE ASURAS BEGAN TO PRACTISE COMPASSION.
MY HEART IS FILLED WITH A KIND OF JOY I'VE NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE.

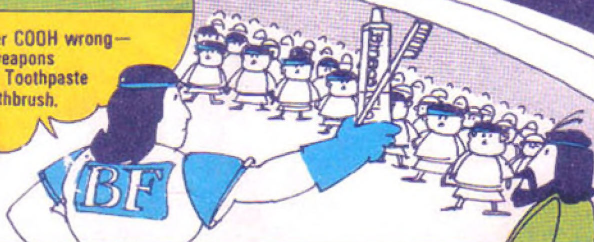

TO REMIND PEOPLE OF THE THREE CARDINAL VIRTUES, SELF-CONTROL, CHARITY AND COMPASSION, IT THUNDERS NOW AND AGAIN —
DA
DA
DA

DOWN WITH THE REBELS!



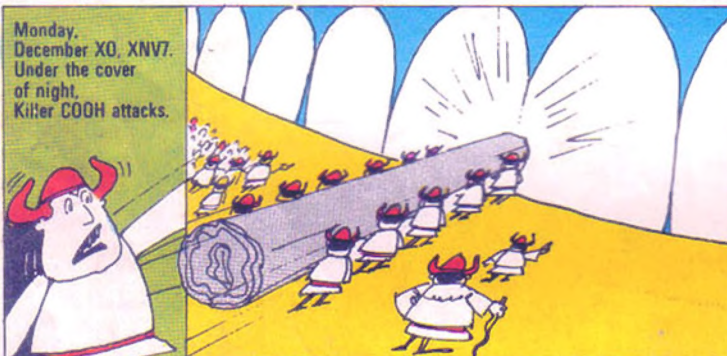
Word reaches the Army Chief.

We must call Binaca-F. Killer COOH knows we're ill-equipped.



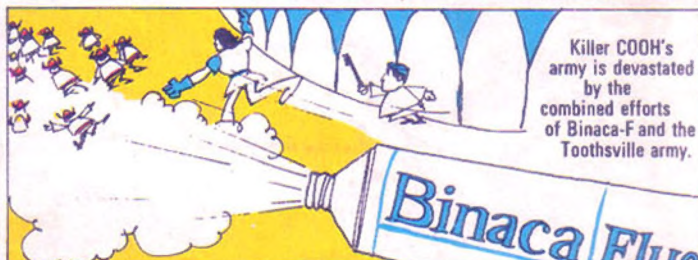
With regular practice morning and night, the Toothsville army is soon battle-ready.















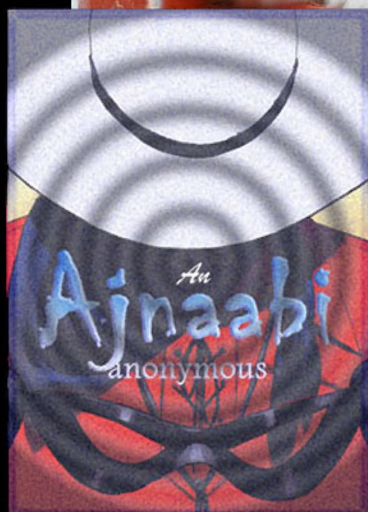
* Formula for Carboxyl acid group, which attacks tooth enamel and causes painful cavities.

Brush in extra toughness.
Arrest tooth decay with Binaca Fluoride.

BEWARE

scaN oR BE scanneD !

MEEWOW



Preservation